

The Haditha Massacre: Isolated Event or Pattern of Behavior of Occupation Forces?

US Killing of Civilians "Fact of Life" in Iraq

By [Global Research](#)

Global Research, May 30, 2006

uruknet.net 30 May 2006

Theme: [Crimes against Humanity](#)

In-depth Report: [IRAQ REPORT](#)

Global Research Editor's Note

To camouflage extensive war crimes committed by occupation forces and US sponsored paramilitaries, Washington is conducting an investigation into "allegations that US marines carried out a massacre of civilians" in Haditha last November. By focusing on a single event, the media reports give the impression that the massacre is an exception rather than a pattern which responds to command decisions established at the highest levels of the US military.

Information was apparently "leaked", as if the US media did not know that the US had been committing atrocities against civilians. This is not a case of coverup of a single incident but of official and media coverup of tens of thousands of civilians killed by occupation forces as documented by the Lancet study, John Hopkins School of Public Health.

Everybody in Iraq knows that these crimes are being committed on a daily basis, but the US media is mum on the subject.

Below a BBC report (May 30) illustrates the media bias in the coverage of US war crimes, presenting the incident as "a mistake" "worse" than Abu Ghraib and putting the blame on individual US servicemen.

The urknet report paints a somewhat different perspective. It essentially states that "the killing of two dozen Iraqi civilians in cold-blood by US occupation forces near the western Iraqi city of Haditha last November is part of a pattern of US behavior in the country".

Michel Chossudovsky, 30 May 2006

BBC Report

The Pentagon is close to ending its own inquiries into the deaths, initially attributed to a clash with militants.

Observers say the incident could deal a more serious blow to US standing than the Abu Ghraib scandal.

It is not justifiable that a family is killed because someone is fighting terrorists Nouri Maliki Iraqi prime minister

According to initial US military reports, 15 civilians and eight insurgents died after a bomb killed a marine in Haditha, a militant stronghold in Anbar Province.

The civilians were “victims of a wrong operation”, Mr Maliki said in a separate interview with the BBC.

“It is not justifiable that a family is killed because someone is fighting terrorists.”

Speaking to Reuters, he said his government was worried by “the increase in ‘mistakes’” and would ask “for answers not only about Haditha but about any operation... in which killing happened by mistake”.

“We will hold those who did it responsible,” he added.

The BBC’s Justin Webb reports from Washington that enough material has now been leaked to the US media about events in Haditha to suggest to many Americans that allegations of a massacre are very serious and may well be true.

‘Cold blood’

US investigators are looking at both the actual events in Haditha on 19 November and an alleged cover-up by troops.

The military said at the time that the civilians were killed as a result of either the bomb or a gun battle which erupted afterwards, in which the militants were reportedly killed.

But reports from Iraqi witnesses and in the US media allege that marines went on a rampage.

According to the Wall St Journal, there is evidence that marines killed civilians, including women and children, without provocation.

Several marines are likely to be charged with murder and others with attempting to cover up the incident, the newspaper said, quoting civilian and military officials close to the investigations.

One of the marines in Haditha that day, Lance Cpl Roel Ryan Briones of Hanford, California, told the Los Angeles Times he had taken photos and carried bodies out of homes as part of a clean-up crew:

“They ranged from little babies to adult males and females. I’ll never be able to get that out of my head. I can still smell the blood.”

Caution plea

Jim Murtha, a Democratic Congressman and former marine, has said he believes civilians in Haditha were murdered and the incident was covered up.

“They killed innocent civilians in cold blood and that’s what the report is going to tell,” he said.

“It is as bad as Abu Ghraib, if not worse,” he told CNN television.

Gen Peter Pace, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and chief military adviser to the US president, said on Monday it would be premature for him to judge the outcome of the investigations.

"If the allegations as they are being portrayed in the newspapers turn out to be valid, then of course there'll be charges," he said.

"We'll get to the bottom of the investigation and take the appropriate action."

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Uruknet Report

BAGHDAD – The killing of two dozen Iraqi civilians in cold-blood by US occupation forces near the western Iraqi city of Haditha last November is part of pattern of US behavior in the country, Iraqis have commented on what would be the worst case of abuse by American soldiers in Iraq since the 2003 invasion.

"The American soldier has become an expert in killing," Abdel Salam Al- Qubaisy, spokesman for the Sunni Association of Muslim Scholars (AMS), told Reuters Sunday, May 28.

He said the Haditha incident was only part of a pattern of US behavior in Iraq.

"This must be considered a war crime and the commanders tried," he added.

At a barber shop nearby, Ahmed Abdel Rahman could not recall a single one of his talkative customers mentioning Haditha.

One of them, Salah Mohammed, said such violence was common.

"This sort of thing isn't unusual," he said, blaming the prevailing insecurity on the US occupation.

Haditha residents have described how two families, including young children and women, were shot dead in their homes after a Marine was killed by a roadside bomb on November 19.

The military initially said the bomb also killed the civilians. Only the emergence of a film of the bodies led to an inquiry by Time magazine that in turn prompted a US probe into the incident.

Unreported

Iraqi media and politicians have paid scant attention to details leaking out in Washington as they have got accustomed to such incidents day in and day out.

"The US forces have committed more crimes against the Iraqi people than appears in the media," lawyer Abd Mohammed Falah told Reuters.

Mohammed Jawdaat, 47, like many Iraqis, can recount an incident in which he says he saw US forces open fire on civilians.

"Six months ago a car pulled out of a street towards an American convoy and a soldier just opened fire," Jawdaat said.

"The driver was shot in the head and the person behind was killed too. They were innocents. There were no warning shots and the Americans didn't even stop. The police took the wounded."

Imad Mohammed, a teenager selling newspapers at a Baghdad intersection, said he had not seen Haditha on any front page.

"The Americans see a Muslim go into a mosque and just assume he is a terrorist.

"They either arrest him or blow it up."

Cover-up

Congressman John Murtha accused Sunday the US military of trying to "cover up" the civilian killings in Iraq at the hands of US forces.

Asked if he believed there had been a cover-up, Murtha, a prominent critic of the US administration over the Iraq war, told ABC: "No question about it."

"We don't know how far it goes. I mean, it goes right up the chain of command, right up to General Pace. When did he know about it?" Murtha questioned, referring to the chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, Marine General Peter Pace.

Pace is the US' top military officer and a senior advisor to Rumsfeld.

"Who ordered the cover-up? I'm sure he (Pace) didn't, but what ... who said, we're not going to publicize this thing?" Murtha said.

Murtha said the civilian killings have done more damage to America's aims in Iraq than the Abu Ghraib prison abuse scandal.

"We're set back every time something like this happens," he said. "This is worse than Abu Ghraib."

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